

SP-L5 Fuel-Load Management Evaluation*October 25, 2002***1.0 Introduction/Background**

Relicensing stakeholders have expressed concern that historic land management and fire prevention activities within the Study Area have resulted in increased fuel-loading, which has led to an increased risk of destructive wildfires. Obtaining current fuel-load information for the Study Area could facilitate an evaluation of wildfire risk on project lands. In addition, techniques for managing and reducing fuel-loads should be investigated and the associated potential impacts to resources evaluated. Finally, existing fuel-load conditions on project lands and their implications for surrounding communities should be presented, along with recommendations regarding fuel-load management and reduction techniques.

2.0 Study Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Determine if project facilities and operations conform with existing State and local fuel load management plans;
- Provide information that can be used to determine fuel-loads within the Study Area;
- Discuss and evaluate the efficiency level and/or drawbacks of various fuel-load management and reduction methods;
- Communicate such information to other work groups early in the study process for their use and evaluation;
- Summarize the analyses of other work groups with regard to the effects that various fuel-load management and reduction methods could have on resources;
- Prioritize areas for treatment; and,
- Suggest preferred fuel-load management and reduction techniques and ongoing management options.

3.0 Relationship to Relicensing/Need for the Study

Although the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) does not require fuel-load studies as part of the relicensing process, wildfire is an issue that land managers in California need to address. An understanding of current and potential fuel-load management within the Study Area would assist efforts to reduce the likelihood and/or severity of destructive wildfires. It must be noted, however, this study is not a fire management study.

4.0 Study Area

The Study Area includes Lake Oroville, the lands and waters within and adjacent to (1/4 mile) the FERC project boundary, and adjacent lands, facilities, and areas with a clear project nexus.

5.0 General Approach

Task 1—Assessment of Current Fuel-Loads within the Study Area

A literature and data review of appropriate Study Area-related land management and fire control data will be conducted. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF's) Fire Protection Division personnel, websites, GIS databases and published documents will be the primary sources of data. Data acquired by the Environmental Work Group concerning vegetation types will also be useful for characterizing fuel-load conditions.

The Butte County Fire Safety Council's Pre-Fire Engineer will be consulted and will provide relevant data, such as a surface fuels model map for the Study Area. Ground-truthing of existing conditions at selected locations may be conducted as part of this study if warranted.

Ground level photographs of representative areas within the Study Area will be taken to illustrate existing conditions and to serve as a baseline record if treatments to fuel-loads are made. The photographs will assist with the evaluation of the aesthetic aspects related to fuel-load management treatments.

Task 2—Identify Fuel Reduction Management Programs

This task will begin by conducting literature reviews and interviews with CDF and State Parks staff regarding fuel management and treatment. The CDF and DPR fire plans will be consulted as will other relevant information sources regarding various fuel management and treatment techniques. In addition, land management and fire control officials from the United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the City of Oroville, and other entities if appropriate, will be interviewed regarding ongoing fuel reduction programs. The literature and data review will include a search for information on fuel-load management programs at other similar locations in California.

During Task 2, the Engineering and Operations; Environmental; Cultural Resources; and Recreation and Socioeconomics Work Groups will be consulted. The potential effects of various fuel management and treatment techniques on resources will be evaluated and compared prior to the assessments made under Task 3.

Task 3—Suggest Fuel Reduction Strategies

Task 3 will take the information gathered in the previous tasks and synthesize it into a series of suggested measures that could be taken to reduce fuel-loading. This task will not entail a fire reduction or management plan, but will contain data and suggestions that could be expanded to develop such a plan. The suggested measures developed in this task could be used to develop protection, mitigation and enhancement measures (PMEs). Areas would be prioritized for potential treatment. In addition, ongoing fuel load management strategies, including monitoring activities, would be discussed.

6.0 Results and Products/Deliverables

Results

As a result of this study, areas within the Study Area will be identified in terms of existing fuel-load type and assessment of conditions. The acceptability and effectiveness of various fuel-load management and reduction techniques will be identified. Appropriate initial treatment and ongoing fuel-load management strategies, including monitoring activities, will be identified. In addition, areas will be prioritized for potential treatment.

Products/Deliverables

The following products will be developed for this study:

- Interim Fuel-Load Study Report
- Fuel-Load Study Report

The reports will summarize the study's findings and the suggestions made under Task 3. Maps that identify different fuel-load conditions will be included, as will photographs of existing conditions.

7.0 Coordination and Implementation Strategy

Coordination with Other Resource Areas/Studies

This study will involve working closely the Engineering and Operations; Environmental; Cultural Resources; and Recreation and Socioeconomics Work Groups. Different groups will be able to combine efforts to obtain baseline data. The Land Use research team will determine how existing or potential new management actions or policies associated with suggestions from the other work groups could influence fuel-loads within the Study Area. Prior to starting the study, the team will meet with other work groups to determine where and when relevant data can be gathered and shared among all groups. The research team will maintain communication with the other work groups as suggestions are developed to ensure that they are acceptable to all teams.

Data collected through other Land Use studies such as existing land uses, GIS data layer development and land management plans will be coordinated.

Issues, Concerns, Comments Tracking and/or Regulatory Compliance

This study will address Issue Statement LM2—existing and future fuel-loads, fuel management practices, and coordination of fuel management activities for lands located within and adjacent to the project boundary to manage the risk of loss of property, lives and natural resources. The following associated Issues will also be addressed:

- Issue LM E6—fuel-loads on state lands
- Issue LM E7—fuel management on National Forest System lands
- Issue LM E10—current fire management practices on adjacent lands

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- Issue LM E14—evaluate fuel-loading within the project area

8.0 Study Schedule

Data collection: July 2002 through March 2003.

Data analysis and report writing: June 2002 through March 2003.

Interim Fuel-Load Report due: March 2003.

Final Fuel-Load Report Due: June 2003.